

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 TEL AV 11081 261525Z
ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T TEL AVIV 11081

EXDIS

FOR THE SECRETARY AND SAUNDERS FROM AMBASSADOR

PASS WHITE HOUSE

CAIRO FOR AMBASSADOR AND USDEL

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PBOR, EG, IS, XF
SUBJECT: THE CHRISTMAS SUMMIT-FRAGMENTS GLEANED AT BEN GURION
AIRPORT

1. MINGLING WITH THE ISRAELI CABINET AND OTHER ASSORTED IDGNITARIES
FOR AN HOUR AND A HALF AT THE AIRPORT PRIOR TO BEGIN'S ARRIVAL
HOME, I ENCOUNTERED A DIFFERENT MOOD FROM THAT WHICH INFECTED
THE SAME THROG YESTERDAY MORNING WHEN HE DEPARTED FOR EGYPT.
EXULTATION AND OPTIMISM HAD GIVEN WAY TO MUCH SOBERED
REALISM ABOUT THE TOUGH NEGOTIATING PATH AHEAD. MOST HAD JUST
HEARD OR SEEN THE JOINT SADAT/BEGIN PRESS CONFERENCE IN CAIRO.
MANY COMMENTED ON SADAT'S SUBDUED MOOD AND THE OBVIOUS ABSENCE
OF THE MUCH HERALDED "DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES." BUT EVERYONE WAS
CLINGING HOPEFULLY TO THE AGREEMENT TO SET UP THE POLITICAL AND
MILITARY COMMITTEES AS THE ESSENTIAL SYMBOL THAT NEGOTIATIONS ARE
NOW TRULY UNDER WAY.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 TEL AV 11081 261525Z

2. SEVERAL CABINET MINISTERS TOLD ME THAT BEGIN'S PROPOSALS
HAD SEVERELY SHAKEN SOME MEMBERS OF THE LIKUD COALITION,
ESPECIALLY THE EXTENT OF HIS OFFER ON SINAI. ALL HAD EVENTUALLY
SUPPORTED BEGIN - BUT FOR VERY DIFFERENT REASONS. SOME BECAUSE
THEY ASSUME HE WILL HAVE TO GO FURTHER ON THE PALESTINIAN
QUESTION; SOME BECAUSE THEY WERE CONVINCED HE WOULD GO NO RPT NO
FURTHER. AS THE NEGOTIATIONS UNROLL, THESE INTERNAL POLITICAL

CONTRADICTIONS WILL THREATEN THE COALITION'S COHESION. AS FOR LABOR, HOWEVER, ALL AGREED WITH ABBA EBAN'S DISPARAGING REMARKS ABOUT ITS HOPELESS INTERNAL DIVISIONS. AS A POLITICAL FORCE, LABOR CAN POSE NO THREAT NOW TO BEGIN'S NEGOTIATING FLEXIBILITY. MANY AGREED THAT IT IS WITHIN THE HERUT CORE OF HIS POLITICAL BASE THAT BEGIN FACES INCREASING TROUBLE - AND A KIND OF TROUBLE WHICH WILL BE ESPECIALLY PAINFUL FOR HIM PERSONALLY TO DEAL WITH.

3. BEGIN WAS RELAXED, CONFIDENT, AND RELENTLESSLY UPBEAT IN HIS PRESS CONFERENCE AFTER ARRIVAL. FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN ASKED WHETHER AN AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE HAD BEEN REACHED ON SINAI, HE RESPONDED "YES, I THINK SO. I HOPE SO." AND HE STRESSED THE MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE STRUCTURE NOW ESTABLISHED FOR DETAILED NEGOTIATIONS.

4. YEHUDA AVNER TOLD ME THAT SADAT WAS UNDER GREAT PRESSURE FROM HIS ADVISORS NOT TO CONCEDE MUCH. HE SAID THAT IN THEIR PRIVATE TALK BEGIN AND SADAT HAD AGREED ON THE KEY "JOINT DECLARATION" LANGUAGE CONCERNING THE WEST BANK AND GAZA AS FOLLOWS: "A JUST SOLUTION FOR THE PALESTINIAN ARAB PROBLEM". HOWEVER, AFTER MEETING WITH HIS ADVISORS SADAT DREW BACK - AND THE FINAL RESULT WAS THE UNSATISFACTORY FORMULA OF SPLIT POSITIONS READ BY SADAT TO THE PRESS CONFERENCE.

5. EZER WEIZMAN CONFIRMED THE TOUGHNESS OF SADAT'S ADVISORS AND THEIR GREAT WORRIES OVER ARAB WORLD REACTIONS. HE SAID A LITTLE PROGRESS WAS MADE BEYOND HIS TALKS LAST WEEK IN EGYPT, BUT
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 TEL AV 11081 261525Z

NO REAL CHANGE AS YET ON SADAT'S REJECTION OF CONCEPT OF DEMILITARIZATION FOR MOST OF SINAI. HE SEES THE FORTHCOMING MILITARY COMMITTEE MEETINGS AS LONG AND ARDUOUS. ON BALANCE, HOWEVER, WEIZMAN RETURNED SLIGHTLY ENCOURAGED - AND CLEARLY IMPRESSED WITH THE GENUINENESS OF THE EGYPTIAN CONVICTIONS ABOUT SADAT'S POSITIONS.

6. BEGIN PLANS TO TELEPHONE PRESIDENT CARTER WITH A REPORT TONIGHT, AND WILL DEBRIEF IN MORE DETAIL TO ME AT 0900 TUESDAY MORNING BEFORE MEETING HIS CABINET. THERE WILL BE A FULL SCALE KNESSET DEBATE WEDNESDAY, AT WHICH TIME BEGIN HAS PROMISED TO REVEAL ALL ASPECTS OF HIS PROPOSALS FOR PUBLIC SCRUTINY. I WILL SEE WEIZMAN TUESDAY AFTERNOON, AND DAYAN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

7. DEPARTMENT MAY WISH PASS TO AMMAN, DAMASCUS, JIDDA, USUN, LONDON, MOSCOW AND BEIRUT.
LEWIS

NOTE BY OC/T: TEL AVIV 11081 NOT PASSED WHITE HOUSE.

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